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Although less pure than in Cambodia, the bonzes' morals in Laos are generally fairly good. They are, moreover, greatly loved, highly regarded and fondly cherished. When there is a celebration or a great feast in a family, part of the choicest dishes is always reserved for the bonzes.

On the next to the last day of every phase of the moon, the bonzes must make public confession of their faults and be prepared, should the need arise, to undergo the punishments which the code stipulates.

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Bonzeries are schools and at the same time workshops where all trades are taught. All knowledge is concentrated in them, as our knowledge was during the Middle Ages in monasteries.

Together with the pagodas, they are also spots of inviolable asylum in accordance with certain rights, and hostelries where travelers are lodged and fed with the produce of the bonzes' alms-seeking.

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Newly ordained bonzes must stay in the pagoda at least three months, and may quit their habit at the end of this period. If a bonze desires to return to the pagoda after he has reentered lay life, his reassumption of the habit gives rise to the same formalities and ceremonies as the first time. It is a new ordination.

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The liturgical litanies of the Buddhist religion, which the bonzes psalmodize, may not be translated into Laotian. The bonzes and the [165] [Illustration] [166] [Blank page] [167] Laotian faithful, as well as the cantors and the French adepts, chant prayers whose meaning they do not understand (1).

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(1) In reality the Laotian, Lu and Youn bonzes form a sort of caste as the Druids used to in Gaul. More particularly, they are the ministers of worship, the repositories of moral authority, of scientific traditions, of secrets and of artistic and industrial methods. They transmit by word of mouth the precepts of Buddhist dogma, which were long ago explained by those who introduced the religion into the land. But the writings in "Pali" which contained these, although they can still be read mechanically by a few scholars, are no longer understood. Thence arises the necessity of handing down their meaning by word alone. Thence also, without doubt, arises the increasingly greater attenuation of the purity and force of these principles as they

779 pass from one generation to another and suffer partial suppressions
178 and numberless interpolations.

[198] The bonzes of our own day do not know the sacred language
792 and are reduced to imitating the "hateful" monks of whom Rabelais speaks, "who neither till the soil nor work, but only mumble a great stock of legends and psalms which they do not understand at all."

792 The bonzes are the ones who consecrate water and prepare with
641 their prayers for the pronunciation of the oath of allegiance which native officials take twice a year to their direct sovereign and, if
788 necessary, to their suzerain both for themselves and for the whole population. The oath consists in reciting the formula and in drinking lustral water in which the candles used for the ceremony have been extinguished and in which the arms of the sovereign have been dipped.

The following is the formula of the oath which is pronounced in Laos twice a year, in the capital of each province, in the presence of the government commissioner. This formula has been in use in the land for centuries and was left just as it was, except for substituting the title of President of the Republic for that of the king of Siam, Vien-Tiane or Luang-Prabang.

Formula of the oath: "I (there follow the names, titles and qualities of each of the mandarins present, each of whom repeats the formula, which is read aloud by one of them, generally the eldest), take an oath of allegiance and offer my life to the President of the French Republic. I give my word before God and before the angels present in heaven. May God and his angels deign to listen to my vows, because the President of the French Republic governs our land with wisdom and skill, follows the ancient customs and protects the bonzes, the authorities and the inhabitants.

"I place myself under his sacred feet, as well as the soldiers and inhabitants who live in my muong, and we all swear him allegiance.

[168] "I ask to serve the administration in the shadow of his sacred feet and to acknowledge his goodness by promising to be faithful and never to revolt in thought, word or body.

"If I show myself ungrateful to, or if I revolt against the President of the French Republic in thought, word or body; if I see or learn that peril threatens the President of the French Republic and remain silent instead of warning him immediately of the peril which I see or know; if I show myself ungrateful towards the President of the

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The terms used to designate the years of these various cycles are taken from the Pali language and other sacred idioms of India.

1. In northern Laos the years of the cycles have the following names:

TEN YEAR CYCLE	TWELVE YEAR CYCLE
Kate-Sok.	Pi-Tkiaĭ.
Kaute-Sok.	Pi-Pao.
Odane-Sok.	Pi-Gui.
Tao-Sok.	Pi-Maô.
Kâ-Sok.	Pi-Si.
Kab-Sok.	Pi-Saĭ.
Hab-Sok.	Pi-Sagnâ.
Oueĭ-Sok.	Pi-Mote.
Mûng-Sok.	Pi-Sane.
Peûk-Sok.	Pi-Hao.
	Pi-Sète.
	Pi-Kaĭ.

2. In southern Laos and Siam the years of the cycles have the following names:

TEN YEAR CYCLE	TWELVE YEAR CYCLE
Eka-Sok.	Pi-Xuèt (of the rat).
Thô-Sok.	Pi-Xalu (of the ox).
Tri-Sok.	Pi-Khane (of the tiger).
Tiattava-Sok.	Pi-Thô (of the hare).
Bentia-Sok.	Pi-Marong (of the great dragon).
Xô-Sok.	Pi-Maseng (of the small dragon).
Sattha-Sok.	Pi-Mamia (of the horse).
Attha-Sok.	Pi-Mamè (of the goat).
Nophâ-Sok.	Pi-Vok (of the monkey).
Thatsa-Sok.	Pi-Raka (of the cock).
	Pi-Tio (of the dog).
	Pi-Koun (of the pig).

Hill Tribes

595 There is polygamy among the Meos, and the Meo women do not enjoy any higher regard than the Kha women.

[101] The Yaos. The Yaos have the same origin as the Meos, and are strikingly like them in many respects. Their mores, their beliefs and their habits are identical.

619 As we have seen above, the Yaos are divided into three varieties, these being the Lantenes, the Khao and the Ao-Tchaine.

291 The Lantenes (blacks) wear broad trousers, a long smock buttoning
302 at the side and a turban, all made of black cottonstuff. They wear their hair long and either wound under a turban or braided in Chinese style.

[342] Their houses are like those of the Meos and shelter several families, each of which has its own quarters. They are generally clean and well kept-up.

593 The mores of the Lantene Yaos are patriarchal, and these folk
562 are monogamous. The women are very reserved and do not let themselves be seen much by strangers. They enjoy a certain respect and are treated with consideration by their husbands.

231 The Lantenes are great livestock breeders, and cultivate the opium
241 poppy in addition to rice and maize. They are skilled hunters of wild animals, and each man owns a rifle from which he is rarely separated.

224 Besides a dialect peculiar to them, they speak Quoan-hoa (a
[212] Cantonese idiom), and many of them can write Chinese characters.

[198] The Khao Yaos are less outgoing than their fellows and do not
101 greet strangers with as much good will.

291 The men's clothing is like that of the Lantenes, [269] but the women are garbed in a different manner and wear their hair in a special way which has earned their tribe the name "Khao" (horns).

Over a pair of black trousers ornamented with colored embroidery and held in place by leggings, Khao Yao women wear a tunic which comes down to the knees but the flaps of which are fastened to the belt. This tunic also has colored embroidery on the chest, back, neck and cuffs, and is held shut with wide silver hooks.

302 Their hairdress consists of a coil which is smeared with wax and lacquer to hold it in place and in which a wooden socket is imbedded. A light bamboo framework is inserted into the socket, and over this is spread a red cloth or a black cloth embroidered in red. The women thus appear to have two horns on their head.

301 Silver jewelry, neckbands, bracelets and ear pendants are worn by the Khao Yaos.

516 progresses at an even, elongated pace, carrying as much as 30 kilo-
417 grams in his pack without even seeming to suspect the feats of strength,
[132] suppleness and balance which he accomplishes. As long as he remains on high ground his resistance to fatigue is very great indeed, but he cannot go down to the lowlands without danger, especially in the hot season.

101 Certain authors claim that the word "Meo" which, when pronounced with a certain intonation, means cat in several Indo-Chinese languages, was given to these folk by reason of their agility. However, we must note that in [109] Laotian the word "Meo" used to designate these mountainfolk is neither written or pronounced like the word meo which is used to designate cats. There is the same difference between these two words as there is in French between the words maitre and mètre.

342 A Meo house is built at ground level on slightly leveled ground. The walls are made of puddled clay or of ill-fitting boards, and the house is roofed with thatch or crudely-squared wooden shingles. The doors are made of wood which has been shaped with an ax, and there
[592] are no windows. Often several families live in the same house, and then each has a fireplace to itself and a compartment which serves it as a bedroom. In the common room there is an oven and fireplaces above which objects are placed to dry on a bamboo framework. Behind the house a narrow passageway is left free separating the
[343] building from the sheer mountainside. In front there is a narrow veranda where the horses are kept when they are not housed in a stable built on piles and overhanging the mountainside, as are the animal barn and pig sty, the rice granary and the goat pen. This system has the advantage of protecting the animals from the dampness of the ground, since the planks which form the floor jut out over empty space on their solid piles.

[101] Inside the house there are a few furnishings, as among all peoples of Chinese origin. There are benches, tables, camp beds, dishes,
352 iron and copper cooking utensils and opium smoking accessories, all
356 so repulsively filthy that even the least delicate would hesitate to enter and stay in these hovels, where vermin swarm under the protection of the ancestors' altar.

• 198 Although amongh themselves and with their families the Meos speak a rather unharmonious language, nearly all the men can under-
212 stand and speak Qouane-hoa, the language of the Chinese mandarins, which is the official language in Yunnan. They can neither read nor write Chinese characters, and have no system of writing of their own.

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538 treatises on metaphysics.

[198] [178] Such is the whole of the Buddhist canon in force in Laos. Unfortunately, as the knowledge of Pali disappeared, many texts were forgotten because they were not understood and therefore were not followed. But certainly the most popular text and that which forms the core of all Buddhist literature is the Jatakam.

The Jatakas.

This name is given to a collection of tales about the former lives of the Buddha. As the Master is supposed to have had the greatest variety of experiences from the animal state to that of a god, going through the different states of humanity, his long career as bodhisattva provides ample material for stories of all sorts, moral tales, satirical tales, parables, fables, etc. These stories have no equivalent in any literature, for Buddha knows not only his own births, but also the former births of all creatures, and these he relates as the occasion presents itself. The method of exposition is always the same. The narrator tells more or less briefly the circumstances giving rise to the story of the Buddha, then comes the story itself, finally by way of conclusion, the Buddha relates the past to the present by indicating the identity of the characters in their various roles.

The greatest number of Jatakas take place at the time when "Brahmadatta reigned in Benares," which is the equivalent of our "once upon a time."

In these tales the Buddha appears in the most varied roles; he is in turn ascetic, king, scholar, courtier, brahman, prince, noble, merchant, landlord, slave, potter, elephant-driver, woodcutter, mason, thief, actor, student, etc. Sometimes he is a god or the deity of [28] a tree, sometimes merely an animal, such as a serpent, a lizard, a bull, a pig, a dog, etc. The Buddha has none of the prejudices of nobility. Instead he gives a comforting example of how in all ranks of creation one can realize perfection in oneself and serve the collective interests of the universe. The most incongruous materials are harmoniously blended in this incoherent collection which is always frank. The whole Indian folklore is poured into this convenient framework, where it has received the Buddhist stamp, and been spread throughout the whole Far East where it has been received with enthusiasm.

There are 547 Jatakas. Some are more popular than others. Thus, in Laos, there are ten which form a special collection called "Sip Xat" (the ten Jatakas). The best known are the Temiya Jataka: (Cf. Appendix: Luang Prabang).

776 of one or several spirits who are reincarnated in one possessed. This
796 person enables the villagers and those living in the same quarter to
787 know the course of the new year and, if necessary, to improve it by means of gifts and prayers. During this time the village is forbidden to strangers (Lévy).

776 A series of particularly dangerous phi is also known; these are
725 the Phi Phetu (Sk: Preta), that is the wandering souls of people who have died in an abnormal way, by accident, suicide, childbirth for a woman, etc. These souls cannot be born again. They remain present in order to torment human beings. The Phi Houa Kout are
776 the headless phi, the Phi Khon Long are those who carry the coffins,
754 the Phi Pop have the power of entering into the body of a living human being. The unfortunate person then has the evil eye and is expelled from the village. In the region of Savannakhet, there is a village of victims of the Phi Pop which was created by a Protestant mission, in order to rescue these poor creatures who would otherwise die of hunger, for they are forbidden to enter any village.

The Phi Phong are the spirits of human beings who have studied the formulas to acquire magic powers but have not conformed strictly to certain rites prescribed by their studies. They are bloodthirsty and go out at night by the light of the fire [32] which issues from their nostrils along the banks of rivers and streams, and of ponds, to catch fish and toads. If one meets a Phi Phong, one must flee for he can spit in one's face, and then one may become a Phi Phong oneself.

776 The Phi Kong Koi lives in the mountains and has the shape of a monkey. During his existence on earth he was the servant of a Vietnamese. One day, having been too badly treated, he decided to escape. But in order not to be caught, he camouflaged his footprints by putting his heels in front and his toes behind. The Vietnamese, deceived by this trick, went off in the opposite direction and never found him. In our days when the Laotians want to chase away the Phi Kong Koi, the speak Vietnamese to each other. But if one is traveling in the mountains, one must refrain from lighting a fire or cooking any fish or meat or crabs, for the odor attracts the phi who wants to come and eat. His victim would have his intestines split open. The approach of the phi is always preceded by a violent storm and a torrential rain. There are said to be a great many Phi King Koi in the region of Samneua.

[198]

There is, however, another kind of Phi. This one seems to have a particular hatred for archaeologists. These are the phis who inhabit sculptures or the tumuli which are found in the bush [en brousse]. But that is another story...